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The Sacrifice to the Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee

BY

RALPH LINTON

Assistant Curator of North American Ethnology

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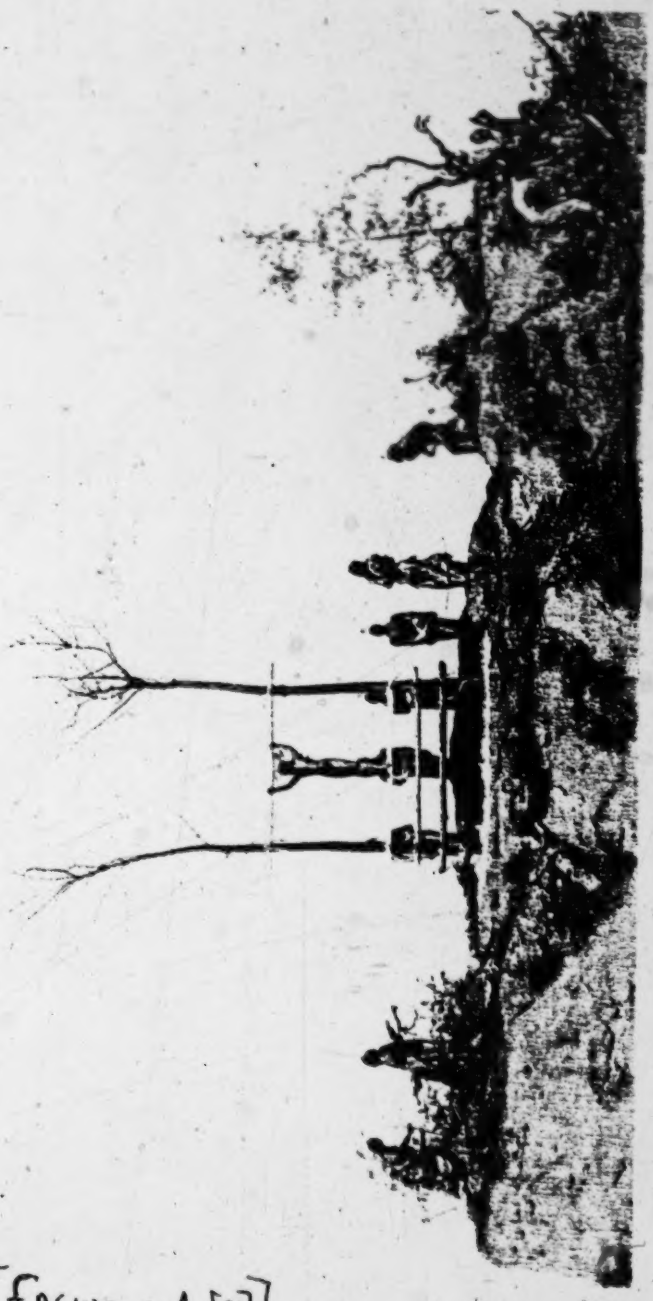

MINIATURE GROUP SHOWING THE MORNING STAR SACRIFICE.

[facing p. 1 [21]]

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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
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The Sacrifice to the Morning Star by the Skidi Pawnee

The religion of the Pawnee was, in some ways, more highly developed than that of any of the other Plains tribes. At the head of their pantheon stood Tirawa, the creator of the universe, who seems to have been conceived of as a purely spiritual being. Below him there were a great number of gods of varying importance who were divided into two great classes, those of the earth and those of the heavens. The former were inferior in rank to the heavenly gods, and were the special guardians of individuals and secret societies. They were, for the most part, identified with animals. The latter were the guardians and helpers of the people as a whole and were, with a few exceptions, identified with stars. The most important of the heavenly gods were the Morning and Evening Stars, who represented respectively the male and female principle. The first being on earth was believed to have sprung from their union. A fuller account of Pawnee mythology will be found in Leaflet 5 "The Thunder Ceremony of the Pawnee."

The ceremonial side of Pawnee religion showed an equally high development. The worship of the heavenly gods centered around collections of sacred objects called by the whites sacred bundles. Each village possessed one of these bundles, and there were others which were the property of the tribe as a whole. It was believed that each bundle had been given to the people in ancient times by one of the heavenly beings,

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778 and therefore constituted a link between the people
796 and its divine giver. In the ceremonies connected with these bundles two ideas were basic,—one the idea of a sacrifice or offering, and the other that of a repetition, either through dramatization or ritual, of the acts performed by the divine giver. The human sacrifice to the Morning Star combined both ideas to an unusual degree.

175 The Morning Star sacrifice was performed only
782 by the Skidi band of the Pawnee. There seems good
796 evidence that it was carried out somewhat unwillingly, and that the officiating priests always found it a sore trial. Its performance was considered a religious duty, and this ceremony must not be confused with the torturing of captives as practised by several of the eastern tribes. The opposition to the sacrifice within the tribe itself increased until in about 1818 a young man, named Petahlayshahrho, rescued the victim in dramatic fashion, untying her from the scaffold at the moment of sacrifice and riding away with her. When safe, he gave her a horse, and sent her back to her own people. He then returned and declared that human sacrifices must cease. As he was a distinguished warrior and the son of the chief's sister, which according to the Pawnee system gave him the hereditary rignt to succeed his uncle, many strong men in the tribe supported his action. After this time, the ritual of the [178] sacrifice was still regularly performed as a formal matter, but no actual sacrifices are known to have taken place.

796 The actual time of the performance of the sacrifice is not fully known, but it seems to have been made in the late spring or summer of years when Mars was [787] morning star. It was usually made as the result of [821] a dream or vision in which the Morning Star appeared to some warrior and demanded it, but it might also be

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made as a result of some sign in the star itself, as when it appeared especially bright, or in years when there was a comet in the sky. It might also be performed without any direct intervention of the Morning Star, if some warrior had captured a suitable victim. 796 787 821

In this ceremony there was, coupled with the idea of sacrifice, an attempt to repeat the acts performed by the Morning Star in ancient times. These acts are recorded in a number of myths, not always consistent, of which the following is a good example:— 796

LEGEND

A long time ago Tirawa made the stars and gave them great power. He gave most of his power to the Morning star, who had a younger brother, the Sun. The Morning Star helped the Sun to have light. When Tirawa placed the stars in the heavens, they were just like human beings. In the east he placed those stars which were like men and gave the Morning Star and the Sun rule over them. In the west he placed those which were like women, with the Evening Star and the Moon as their rulers. Each had their village in the heavens, and the eastern stars knew that the western stars were women. After awhile some of the eastern stars sought the western stars in marriage. When the women stars saw a man star coming, they would tell the Moon, and she would go out to meet him. She would ask him why he came, and he would say, "I come to marry one of the women." She would answer, "That is what we want, come with me." They would walk together till they came in sight of the village. Then the Moon would stop and make a motion, and the ground would open so that the man star fell through and was killed. At last the Morning Star decided to go. He took with him his younger brother, the Sun, who carried upon his back a sacred bundle with a war club. As they traveled, the Morning Star went before 539 773

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539 the Sun just as he still does. After a while they came
773 within sight of the Evening Star village. They sat down and placed the sacred bundle in front of them. From where they sat, they could see the women stars playing all sorts of games outside their village. After a while the Moon came to them as she had come to the others. She asked, "Why do you come here?" The Morning Star said, "It is now time that we mingle and become one people. It is not right for part of us to be on the west and part on the east side." She said, "Good. I am glad you came and brought that bundle which you have in front of you. My thoughts are about that bundle." She invited them to come to the village, and they rose and followed. When they had gone a little way, she stopped them, and the Morning Star saw that the ground under them was cracking. The Moon called to them, "Come on! Are you afraid?" The Morning Star answered, "No. I am determined to have you." He took the war club from his younger brother and sang:—

"I become myself when I become angry.
With the war club I strike the earth.
I strike the ground and undo the power of the Moon."

Then he struck the ground, and the cracks closed up, and it became firm. The Moon cried, "These are powerful men. They have destroyed my mother." By her mother she meant the power which was her own. Her powers had been given her by the Evening Star.

After the first obstacle, they went on until they came to a bed of flints too sharp to be walked over, then to a thick wood of locust trees, then to a place where it was very hot, then to a bed of cactus, then to a long stretch of sword grass. At each of these obstacles the Morning Star sang his song and struck the ground with his war club so that the obstacle disappeared. When they had passed these dangers, they

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came to magic animals which attacked them, first snakes, then water animals, then buffalo, and last bears. Each of these in turn the Morning Star killed with his club. Then the Moon had no more powers left, and the Morning Star and the Sun entered the village of the women stars. The Morning Star married the Evening Star, and the Sun married the Moon. They took them back to their own village. After a time a child was born to each couple, and these children were placed on earth. They married, and from them sprang the human race.

The Moon put all these obstacles in the way of the Morning Star, because she did not want the people on earth, in after times, to live forever. All these obstacles were sicknesses and troubles which would be brought down upon the people. But the Morning Star and the Sun can give power to men to destroy these ills just as they themselves destroyed the obstacles.

It has already been said that the sacrifice was most commonly made as a result of a dream or vision in which the Morning Star demanded it. Immediately on waking in the morning, the man who had had the dream went outside his lodge and began crying and mourning, his cries gradually becoming a song. He sang:—

"When he comes.
When he comes.
Father, I am seeking for you."

By this song he let the people know that he had seen the Morning Star in a vision.

It is said that the man who had had the vision sometimes did not obey the Morning Star, but more often he could neither sleep nor rest until he had captured a maiden for sacrifices. As soon as possible after the vision he went to the keeper of the Morning Star bundle and received from him the warrior's cos-

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721 tume and sacred objects kept in the bundle for such
796 expeditions. Many warriors usually volunteered to go with him, for it was thought that the object of the expedition insured its success.

726 When the party had assembled, they set out for the
796 country of the enemy, sending scouts constantly in ad-
[782] vance. If they killed any game on the way, they offered part of it to the Morning Star to remind him that they were on his business. The leader carried the
[778] sacred objects from the Morning Star bundle on his back.

When the scouts returned with word that they had found an enemy village, the party retired to some sheltered place and prepared for a ceremony. A circle was cleared, and a fireplace excavated as for a lodge. The leader then opened his pack and put on the sacred warrior's costume, and laid out the other objects to the west of the fireplace. A fire was kindled, and smoke
[533] offered to the heavenly gods. All then sang a song symbolizing the overcoming of the Evening Star by the Morning Star and how, from their union, a girl was born. In the course of this song the leader rose and circled the fireplace, acting in pantomime the journey of the Morning Star. At its conclusion he passed out of the circle, and standing facing the east addressed
[782] the Morning Star as follows: "I am praying to you as you directed, and we are seeking a sacrifice as you wished. I ask you to show yourself." In answer to
[821] this prayer the star was thought to shine with brighter light. The leader then addressed his party thus:—

"Warriors, young men, we are now sitting in a place dedicated to the Morning Star. We are about to sing the song that the Morning Star himself sang when he was in search of a woman, who put obstacles in his way. I want you all to dance with all your might and to be brave. Whoever shall be so lucky as to catch

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the girl must call her Opirikuts as he touches her. 726
Others must move away and not touch her. The life 796
of anyone who touches her afterward will be in danger. Everyone must now dance toward the center. Let the fire be like the enemy."

All then sang a song symbolizing the obstacles [533]
overcome by the Morning Star, the refrain being, "This [539]
is the way I did when I became angry." A red-painted stick like those used in the Thunder Ceremony had meanwhile been prepared, and this was now offered to the Morning Star by the leader with the words, "See, [782]
I offer you only this stick with tobacco. It is all I have. Help me to obtain a real sacrifice."

By the end of this ceremony it was almost time for the Morning Star to rise, and the leader went outside the circle to the east and addressed a long invocation to him. He then returned, and all put on their war paint and ornaments. A fourth song was then sung in which [533]
four of the great heavenly spirits were called upon to [539]
give the warriors their powers. As they sang, the [535]
warriors danced around the fire, leaping upward and giving their war cries, while the leader ran about encouraging them to dance harder. At the end of the dance the leader made a last prayer to the Morning Star, and all set out for the village.

The war party surrounded the village quietly. The leader, who at this time was considered a personification of the Morning Star, took his post to the east, with his back to the village, while a second man took his place at the southeast, and was directed to howl like a wolf, as soon as the Morning Star rose. As soon as his call was heard, the leader turned toward the village, and the attack began from all sides. The first man to capture a young woman touched her and called out, "I pronounce you Opirikuts." As soon as this was done, the attackers drew off and started toward home.

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727 The word Opirikuts was both a dedication and a
796 curse. As applied to the destined sacrifice, it was the
782 former, and protected her from any mistreatment. From the moment it was pronounced she was sacred to the Morning Star, and any one touching her would die as from an infection. She was turned over by her captor to the leader and the man who had howled like a wolf, who represented respectively the Morning Star and another star called Fools-the-Wolves. These men were responsible for her until the arrival of the party at the home village.

When the party had arrived at the Pawnee camp, the girl was given into the care of the chief of the Morning Star village. Several months sometimes intervened between the time of her capture and that of the sacrifice, and during this time she was well fed and made as happy and comfortable as possible. It was forbidden, however, to give her any new clothing, as the giver would thereby become Opirikuts also and die. She was fed with a bowl and spoon kept in the Morning Star bundle for the purpose, and no one else might use these. If a man deliberately broke one of these taboos and died, he was thought to have taken the girl's place as a sacrifice, and she was released and sent back to her own people. If she escaped, it was thought a sign that the Morning Star had rejected her, and she was not pursued.

796 When the proper season for the sacrifice had arrived, the chief of the Morning Star village had all the furniture removed from the interior of his lodge and sent two errand men to summon the participants in the ceremony. The priest of the village came, bringing his sacred bundle, and spread out its contents on the west of the lodge to form an altar. With him came his assistant, usually a relative, who would succeed to the office on his death. These men seated themselves be-

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hind the altar. The girl, who was constantly attended by a guardian, was brought in and seated on the south side of the lodge. The chief of the village took his place on the southwest, with the leader of the war party on his left, while the man who had actually captured the girl sat on the northeast. 796

The priest built two little fires of sweet grass, one to the east, and the other to the west of the fireplace. The girl was taken to the eastern fire, undressed, and her body bathed in the smoke. Her guardian then painted her whole body red and dressed her in a black skirt and robe which were kept in the sacred bundle between sacrifices. The man who had captured the girl then went to the altar, and was dressed by the priest in another costume, also kept in the bundle. He was given black leggings and moccasins, his face and hair were painted red, and a fan-shaped head-dress of twelve eagle feathers was attached to his hair in such a way that it stood out straight over the back of his head at right angles to his body. This was the costume in which the Morning Star usually appeared in visions, and with its assumption the captor seems to have become a personification of that deity. 727 782 796 [302] [302] [776] [787]

After these ceremonies had been performed, the captor left the lodge and passed through the village, entering every lodge and warning those who were to take part in the ceremony to come to the chief's lodge. Each family gave him a little red and black paint and certain other objects which were needed in the ceremony. When he had completed the circuit, he returned to the chief's lodge, and errand men were sent out to invite the chiefs and priests of all the villages to come to the ceremony. The Pawnee village was a social as well as a geographical unit. Several villages might live together. Each of the priests and chiefs had his prescribed place in the circle, while the space 796 [361] [621]

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796 behind them was packed with spectators. So great was the eagerness of the people to see the ceremony that many of them tore holes in the roof and walls of the lodge, leaving it a complete wreck.

793 When all the invited guests had taken their places,
796 the chief priest told the priests of the Four Direction bundles to go into the woods and bring back four thick
[824] poles about twelve feet long. The priest of the northeast was to bring an elm; he of the northwest, a box elder; he of the southwest, a cottonwood; and he of the
796 southeast, a willow. When they had returned, the four poles were laid on the fireplace with their ends together so that they formed a cross whose arms pointed to the four directions. The poles had to be long enough to last for the entire four days of the ceremony, and as they burned, they were pushed in toward the center, the cross being always maintained.

The ceremonies which followed are not fully known, but they consisted of many songs and dances, with feasting, and continued for three days and nights.
[786] During this time, and for the three days after the slaying of the sacrifice, the ordinary rules of conduct were set aside, and the priests announced to the people that if any man approached any woman during this period, she was to go with him willingly, that the tribe might increase.

727 Toward morning of each night, the representative
782 of the northeast village danced around the fireplace,
796 and taking the pole brought by the priest of that direction, pointed its glowing end toward the girl's body. This was repeated by the representative of the other directions in turn, but the girl's body was never touched with the brand. Indeed, the girl was treated with the greatest respect and consideration throughout the ceremony. She was told that the entire performance was given in her honor, and everything was done to lull

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her suspicions and keep her in a pleasant frame of mind.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, the chief priest selected four men from the Four Band village to secure the materials for the scaffold. Under the direction of the leader of the war party which had captured the girl, they went to the nearest thick timber and searched until they found a hackberry tree near the center of the grove. At this tree they made an offering of smoke to the gods, and then went northeast from it to find an elm, northwest to find a box elder, southwest to find a cotton wood, and southeast to find a willow. These were to serve for the lower cross-bars of the scaffold. They then went east until they found an elm and a cottonwood large enough to be used as uprights. Finally, they went west and cut a willow to serve as the top cross-bar.

When the men had departed to search for the timber, the priests sang a song describing their actions. At its conclusion the chief priest sent the two chiefs of the Morning Star village, accompanied by a warrior, to select the site of the scaffold. This had to be some place near the village which had, to the east of it, a depression or ravine large enough to conceal several men. When the chiefs had made their choice, the warrior accompanying them gave his war-cry. An errand man had been stationed outside the lodge to listen for this, and as soon as he heard and reported it, the priest of the Skull bundle ran to the place, bearing the sacred bow and two arrows. The two chiefs had stationed themselves at the points where the uprights of the scaffold were to stand, and the priest shot an arrow into the ground in front of each of them, thus marking the place where the hole was to be dug. Between these arrows four priests then dug away the soil to a depth of about a foot, making a rectangular pit ap-

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417 proximately the size of the wrapper of a sacred bundle
782 when fully unfolded. The floor of the excavation was
796 then covered with white, downy feathers. This pit was called *kusaru*, and represented the garden which the Evening Star kept in the west, or, according to another account, the reproductive organs of the Evening Star. The white feathers with which it was lined symbolized the milk of women and animals and the juice of young corn. After the pit had been completed, the holes for the uprights of the scaffold were dug by two young girls.

While the digging was going on, the party sent after the timbers had returned. The two uprights of the scaffold were first erected, then each cross-bar was tied on by a warrior from the village of the direction which it represented. Before tying it, the warrior would recount some deed. One would say, "I made a sacrifice of meat and carried it to the priest on my back. After the ceremony was performed, the priest whispered to me, 'You, young man, have brought meat here by means of the pack string. You will have an opportunity before the summer is over to lasso a pony in the enemy's country. The gods now know you. Do not fear to go on the war path.' I went. We found a village, and others became afraid and ran. I went east by myself and found the enemy's horses. I went among them and found one with an eagle-wing fan tied to its tail. I captured it and rode home. Since then I have made many sacrifices." The top cross-bar was tied by two men each of whom had made a sacrifice, but these did not recount any adventures in war.

It is probable that the scaffold was also painted at this time, although the ceremonies connected with the painting are not remembered. The two uprights were painted red and black, the former symbolizing
[822] day, and the latter, night. The lowest cross-bar was

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black, and symbolized the northeast; and its animal guardian, the bear. The second was red, symbolizing the southeast and the wolf. The third was yellow, symbolizing the northwest and the mountain lion; and the fourth white, symbolizing the southwest and the wildcat. The top cross-bar represented the west, and was painted blue or black and white, symbolizing clouds and rain.

By the time the scaffold was completed, it was about sunset, and the people dispersed. All spectators were sent out of the lodge, and the door was closed. The chief priest then drew upon the floor of the lodge four circles, one for each of the world quarters, and outlined them with white downy feathers. Each of these circles represented a region penetrated by the Morning Star in his search for the Evening Star and also the magic animal which he had overcome there. The white feathers symbolized the foam about their mouths when they attacked him. When the circles had been made, the spectators were re-admitted, and the priests sang a song descriptive of the journey of the Morning Star, while the chief priest danced around the lodge with a war club, destroying the circles one by one. When the song was finished, he straightened up and said, "Chiefs, priests, warriors, old men, I have destroyed the regions once controlled by the mysterious woman who wanted darkness forever. These animals were under her control, when the Morning Star traveled in darkness looking for her. She placed an obstacle in the southeast, which was controlled by the wolf. The Morning Star destroyed this obstacle, but preserved the mysterious animal. He continued his journey, traveled to the southwest, and again met an obstacle which he destroyed, but preserved the animal, a wildcat. He continued his journey, and when he came to the northwest, he again met an obstacle. He des-

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796 troyed it, but preserved the animal, a mountain lion.
773 He went on to the northeast, and again destroyed an obstacle, but preserved its guardian, the bear. In the center of the earth in darkness he found the woman, conquered her, touched her with his war club, and turned her into the earth. The Morning Star then called the mysterious animals to him and said, "You beings are now under my control. Stand in the places where I found you, and watch over the people who shall be placed upon the earth and guard them. All powers you have you shall keep. You shall exist as long as the earth lasts. You are now placed as upright posts so that you will always hold up the heavens. Priests, chiefs, warriors, old men, I have this night followed the journey of the Morning Star. We will not forget these beings which he placed in the four directions, for he promised that they should partake of all offerings which the people made to the heavens. Let us begin singing the songs given to us by Mother White Star in the west (the Evening Star)."

533 When the chief priest had finished his speech, all
796 began to sing the prescribed songs, resting and smok-
782 ing informally after each. Like most ceremonial songs, these were long, with many repetitions, and were often
[211] obscure in meaning. As each song was finished, a tally stick, taken from a bunch kept in the sacred bundle, was laid down. The idea underlying this part of the ritual seems to have been that the girl at first belonged to the people and to the world of human affairs, but that, as each song was sung, she became more removed from them until, when the last tally was laid down, she had been won from the people, like a prize in a game, and belonged to the gods.

The singing usually lasted until about two hours
727 before dawn. A priest then climbed on the roof of the
782 lodge and announced to the people that the girl was
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about to be prepared for the sacrifice, and that it was time for everyone to set out for the scaffold. The chief priest undressed the girl, went through the motions of washing her and combing her hair, and painted the right half of her body red and the left half black. Her skirt was then replaced, black moccasins were put on her feet, and a black robe fastened around her shoulders. Lastly a head-dress of twelve black-tipped eagle feathers, arranged like a fan, was fastened on her head.

When the girl had been dressed, all resumed their seats and sang another song at the conclusion of which she was told to rise; and two men, chosen to lead her to the scaffold, came forward and placed thongs around her wrists. All then passed out of the lodge, with the girl in the lead and the priests following behind chanting.

The rate at which the procession moved toward the scaffold depended largely upon the disposition of the girl. Everything was done to conceal the truth from her, and force was not used unless absolutely necessary. If she mounted the scaffold of her own free will, it was considered an especially auspicious omen. The procession was timed to reach the scaffold a few minutes before the Morning Star rose, so that the men who tied her to it could complete their work and leave her alone when the star appeared.

While the girl was being tied to the scaffold, the men chosen for the last rites had assembled in the ravine to the east of it, where they were concealed from her view. A small fire was kindled there, and they prepared their paraphernalia. At the moment the Morning Star appeared, two men came forward bearing firebrands. They were dressed as priests, and had owl skins hung from their necks, showing that they represented the messengers of the Morning Star.

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727 They took their places on either side of the girl, and
782 with their brands touched her lightly in the groin and
796 armpit. They then returned to the ravine, and a third man ran out, carrying the bow from the Skull bundle and a sacred arrow made for the sacrifice. As he came, he gave his war cry, and the people called to him and encouraged him as though he was attacking an enemy. Coming close to the girl, he sent his arrow through her heart, and ran back to the ravine. This part was usually taken by the man who had captured her. A fourth man then came forward with the club from the Morning Star bundle and struck the girl on the head.

A fire had been kindled to the southeast of the scaffold, and as soon as the girl was dead, her guardian came forward with a flint knife, and her captor with the dried heart and tongue of a buffalo. The guardian mounted the scaffold and cut open the body, while the captor held the meat below and caught the blood. The guardian thrust his hand into the thoracic cavity and painted his face with the blood. Sometimes
[266] he is said to have removed her liver and given it to the members of the Bear Medicine Society, who cut it into small pieces and ate it to acquire magical powers. The blood-soaked meat was burned on the fire near the scaffold as an offering to all the gods.

When these rites had been performed, the men among the spectators gave their war cries and crowded forward to shoot arrows into the body. It was thought desirable that as many arrows should be shot as there were males in the tribe, and boys too young to draw a bow were helped by their fathers or mothers. When each man had shot his arrow, the spectators dispersed and returned to the villages where feasting and dancing continued for three days.

782 796 The priests, the guardian, and those intimately

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connected with the ceremony remained at the scaffold. 782
When the crowd had gone, the guardian removed the 796
arrows from the body one by one and handed them to an assistant who divided them into four bundles and laid these bundles northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest of the fireplace. The body was then taken down and carried a short distance to the east of the scaffold, where it was laid face down. The sacred arrow was drawn from its heart and laid upon it. All then returned to the village, and the place was [766] avoided for some time.

It was believed that the soul of the girl left her 775
body at the moment she was struck with the club and 782
went straight to Tirawa, who sent it to the Morning Star. The Morning Star clothed it with flint from his fireplace in the dawn and placed it among the stars in the heavens. Her body was thought to be not like ordinary bodies. Even after her death it possessed life. Things would be born from it, and the earth would be fertilized by it.

The sacrifice as a whole must be considered as a 773
dramatization of the overcoming of the Evening Star 782
by the Morning Star and their subsequent connection, 796
from which sprang all life on earth. The girl upon the scaffold seems to have been conceived of as a personification or embodiment of the Evening Star surrounded by her powers. When she was overcome, the life of the earth was renewed, insuring universal fertility and increase.

Human sacrifices were rare among the North 171
American Indians. The practice is known to have 782
existed among the Natchez, who lived in the present state of Mississippi, and possibly in Arizona and New Mexico. In Mexico, on the other hand, the idea was highly developed, and under the Aztec rule large numbers of victims were immolated every year. It may be

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171 782 significant that several of the practices and concepts connected with the Pawnee sacrifice find Mexican parallels. Early Aztec manuscripts show victims fastened to scaffolds like that used by the Pawnee and shot to death with arrows. In both places the body of the victim was cut open, and the blood offered. The idea that the sacrifice was more acceptable if the victim mounted the scaffold willingly was common to both, together with the still more striking idea that the victim was a personification of a deity. Among the Aztecs this concept reached its highest development, the victim in at least one ceremony being treated as a god for a year before his sacrifice. Finally, in both places there seem to have been astronomical beliefs connected with the sacrifices.

ooo This account has been compiled from the unpublished notes of Dr. G. A. Dorsey and from articles by several other authors.

RALPH LINTON